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SIEUR DE LA VERENDRYE

AND HIS SONS,

THE

DISCOVERERS OF THE

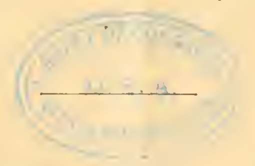
ROCKY MOUNTAINS,

By way of Lakes Superior and Winnipeg, and Rivers Assineboin and Missouri.

"If I succeed, as I hope, I shall have the pleasure and consolation of having rendered a good service to geography, to religion, and to the state"—*Bobe to DeL'Isle, March, 1716.*

BY

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MINNEAPOLIS, MINN.
JOHNSON & SMITH, PRINTERS.

1875.

SIEUR DE LA VERENDRYE.

Three-Rivers, at the confluence of the St. Maurice with the St. Lawrence, ninety miles from Quebec, is one of the oldest hamlets of Canada. A wedding here took place on September 26, 1667, which received some notice at the time. On that day, Marie Boucher, the daughter of the governor of the village, and only twelve years of age, was made the wife of Lt. Rene Gaultier Varennes.

The son-in-law soon succeeded Boucher, and for twenty-two years was the governor of Three-Rivers, and one of his sons, Pierre Gaultier de Varennes, was the Sieur de la Verendrye, the subject of this paper, and the first European explorer of a northern route to the Rocky Mountains.

When a young man, he joined, in 1697, a war expedition against New England, and in 1705 was fighting with the French army in Flanders. Returning to Canada, he identified himself with the opening of the great unknown West.

In 1716, Bobe, a learned priest at Versailles, who had exposed the deception of Lahontan in placing Long River on his map, was constantly urging the French government to search for a northern route to the Pacific. On the 15th of March, 1716, he wrote to De L'Isle, geographer of the Academy of Science at Paris: "They tell me that among the Scioux of the Mississippi,

1. Parkman's "Old Regime in Canada," p. 227.

there are always Frenchmen trading ; that the course of the Mississippi is from north to west and from west to south ; that it is known that toward the source there is in the highlands a a river that leads to the western ocean. * * * * * For the last two years I torment exceedingly the Governor-General, Mr. Raudot, and M. Duche, to endeavor to discover this ocean. If I succeed as I hope, we shall have tidings before three years, and I shall have the pleasure and the consolation of having rendered a good service to geography, to religion, and to the state."[2]

His importunity received its reward, and in 1717, the post erected by DuLuth in 1678, at the head of Lake Superior, near the mouth of the Kamanistigoya, was re-established by Lieut. Robertel de la Noue, and, in 1727, another built among the Sioux, with a view to pushing westward the power of France.

Verendrye, in 1728, was stationed at Lake Nepigon, whose waters flow into Lake Superior from the north.[3] While here, the Indians were so positive relative to a river which flowed toward a sea of the west, that he resolved to make an exploration. At Mackinaw, while on his way to confer with the Governor of Canada upon the subject, Father du Gonor arrived from the post which had been established among the Sioux, nearly opposite Maiden Rock, on the shores of Lake Pepin. After an interchange of views, the priest promised to assist him, as far as he could, in obtaining a permit and outfit for the establishment of a post among the "Cristinaux," or the "Assiniboels," from which to go farther west.[4]

2. Historical Magazine, New York. August, 1859.

3. For many of the facts of this article, I am indebted to two articles of Pierre Margry, published in "*Moniteur Universel.*"

4. The Jesuit du Gonor, with his associate Guignas, came to Lake Pepin with La Perriere Boucher, who had made himself notorious in Massachusetts, by leading the Indian attack on Haverhill. They arrived on Sept. 17, 1727, and erected Fort Beauharnois, opposite Maiden's Rock on a low point. In the spring of 1728, the water rose two feet and eight inches above the floors of the post Below Lake Pepin, in 1683, Perrot established a post. Above Lake Pepin, on Prairie Island, a stockade was erected in 1695. On a creek of the Blue Earth, not far from Mankahto, LeSuer had a post in 1700.

Charles de Beauharnois, then Governor of Canada, gave him a respectful hearing, and carefully examined the map of the region west of the great lakes, which had been drawn by Otchaga, the Indian guide of Verendrye. Orders were soon given to fit out an expedition of fifty men. It left Montreal in 1731, under the conduct of his sons and nephew, he not joining the party till 1733, in consequence of the detentions of business.

In the Autumn of 1731, the party reached Rainy Lake, by the Nantouagan, or Groselliers river, now called Pigeon.[5] Father Messayer, who had been stationed on Lake Superior, at the Groselliers river, was taken as a spiritual guide. At the foot of Rainy Lake a post was erected and called Fort St. Pierre, and the next year, having crossed Minnittie, or Lake of the Woods, they established Fort St. Charles on its southwestern bank. Five leagues from Lake Winnipeg they established a post on the Assiniboine.[6] The river Winnipeg, called by them Maurepas, in honor of the minister of France in 1734, was protected by a fort of the same name.

About this time their advance was stopped by the exhaustion of supplies, but on the 12th of April, 1735, an arrangement was made for a second equipment, and a fourth son joined the expedition.

In June, 1736, while twenty-one of the expedition were camped upon an isle in the Lake of the Woods, they were surprised by a band of Sioux, hostile to the French allies, the Cristinaux, and all killed. The island upon this account is called in the early maps, Massacre Island. A few days after, a

5. Groselliers and Radisson, adventurous fur traders, about the year 1660, went by the Grand Portage to Lake Winnipeg, and were the first Europeans to go from thence to the bottom of Hudson's Bay. It has been said that the river was called after the trader, but it may be after the wild gooseberry bush, *Groseillier*.

6. Named from the Assineeboins, a separate band of the Sioux, or Dakotahs, and known among themselves as Hobays. Fish Netters. The Chippeways call them Asseenay Bwans, Stones Sioux. Living on the wide prairies, they were for the want of fuel obliged to cook their fish by warming the water with hot stones.

A Jesuit Relation written more than two hundred years ago, says: "As wood is very scarce and small with them, nature has taught them to burn stones in place of it, and to cover their wigwams with skins. Some have built mud cabins nearly in the same manner as swallows build their nests."

party of five Canadian voyageurs discovered their dead bodies and scalped heads. Father Ouneau the missionary, was found upon one knee, an arrow in his head, his breast bare, his left hand touching the ground, and the right hand raised.

Among the slaughtered was also a son of Verendrye, who had a tomahawk in his back, and his body adorned with garters and bracelets of porcupine. The father was at the foot of the Lake of the Woods when he received the news of his son's murder, and about the same time heard of the death of his enterprising nephew Dufrost de la Jemerays, the son of his sister Marie Reine de Varennes, and brother of Madame Youville, the foundress of the Hospitaliers at Montreal.[7]

It was under the guidance of the latter that the party had, in 1731, mastered the difficulties of the Nantaouagon, or Groselliers river.

On the 3d of October, 1738, they built an advanced post, Fort La Reine, on the river Assiniboels, which they called St. Charles, and beyond was a branch called St. Pierre. These two rivers received the baptismal name of Verendrye, which was Pierre, and Governor Beauharnois, which was Charles. The post became the centre of trade and point of departure for explorations, either north or south.

It was by ascending the Assiniboine, and by the present trail from its tributary Mouse river, they reached the country of the Mantanes,[8] and in 1742, came to the upper Missouri, passed the Yellow Stone, and at length arrived at the Rocky Mountains.

7. The Indians have a tradition of this occurrence. They state that early one morning a French canoe with eight men. left a trading house which the French had built about the middle of the Lake of the Woods, and stopped upon an island near the last pass to enter the river of Rainy Lake The atmosphere was so still that the wind could hardly be felt. Having built a fire, the smoke was perceived by Sioux warriors, who approached and landed, unperceived, on the opposite side of the isle and massacred the missionary and party.—*Belcourt in Minn Hist. Soc. Annals, 1853.*

8. The Mandans, or White Beards, of the Dakotah family, are noted for being grey-haired. Sometimes children six years of age have this appearance. They were nearly destroyed by Small Pox in 1837, and in 1874 they lived near the Arickarees and Gros Ventres, in the vicinity of Fort Berthold, on the Missouri. Formerly all dwelt in mud cabins surrounded by ditches. A few yet live in dirt lodges.

The party was led by the eldest son and his brother the chevalier. They left the Lake of the Woods on the 29th of April, 1742, came in sight of the Rocky Mountains on the 1st of January, 1743, and on the 12th ascended them. On the route they fell in with the Beaux Hommes, Pioya, Petits Renards, and Arc tribes, and stopped among the Snake tribe, but could go no farther in a southerly direction owing to a war between the Arcs and Snakes.[9]

On the 19th of May, 1744, they had returned to the upper Missouri, and in the country of the Petite Cerise[10] tribe, they planted on an eminence a leaden plate of the arms of France, and raised a monument of stones, which they called Beauharnois. They returned to the Lake of the Woods on the 2d of July.

North of the Assiniboine they proceeded to Lake Dauphin, Swan's Lake, explored the river "Des Biches," and ascended even to the fork of the Saskatchewan, which they called Poskoiac. Two forts were subsequently established, one near Lake Dauphin, and the other on the river "des Biches," called Fort Bourbon. The northern route, by the Saskatchewan, was thought to have some advantage over the Missouri, because there was no danger of meeting with the Spaniards.

Governor Beauharnois having been prejudiced against Verendrye by envious persons, De Noyelles was appointed to take command of the posts. During these difficulties, we find Sieur de la Verendrye, Jr., engaged in other duties. In August, 1747, he arrives from Mackinaw at Montreal, and in the autumn of that year he accompanies St. Pierre to Mackinaw, and brings back the convoy to Montreal. In February, 1748, with five Canadians, five Cristenaux, two Ottawas, and one

9. The Arcs may be the Aricarees. The first attempt to trace the Upper Missouri, is on DeL'Isle's Map of Louisiana, and on it the "Aricaras" are marked as dwelling north of the Pawnees. They speak the same language. In 1874 they lived near Fort Berthold, and were about 900 in nnmber.

10. Petite Cerise—Choke-cherry.

Santeur, he attacked the Mohawks near Schenectady, and returned to Montreal with two scalps, one, that of a chief. On June 20th, 1748, it is recorded that Chevalier la Verendrye departed from Montreal for the West Sea. Magry states that he perished at sea in November, 1761, by the wreck of the "Auguste."

Fortunately, Galissoniere the successor of Beauharnois, although deformed and insignificant in appearance, was fair minded, a lover of science, especially botany, and anxious to push discoveries toward the Pacific. Verendrye the father was restored to favor, and made Captain of the Order of St. Louis, and ordered to resume explorations. While planning a tour up the Saskatchewan, he died on Dec. 6th, 1749.

The Swedish Professor Kalm met him in Canada, not long before his decease, and had interesting conversations with him about the furrows on the plains of the Missouri, which he erroneously conjectured indicated the former abode of an agricultural people. These ruts are familiar to modern travelers, and are only buffalo trails.

Father Coquard, who had been associated with Verendrye, says that they first met the Mantanes, and next the Brochets.[11] After these were the Gros Ventres,[12] the Crows,[13] the Flat Heads,[14] the Black Feet,[15] and Dog Feet, who were established on the

11. Perhaps the Brochet or Fish tribe, may be the Assineboins. The Dakotahs call these Hohays, or Fish-netters. Fish were cooked by heating the water with hot stones.

12. The Gros Ventres and Crows are bands of the Minnetarees, and belong to the Dakotah family. They are found on the tributaries of the Upper Missouri and Yellow Stone. The Crows are called Absarokis or Upsaroka. The Gros Ventres are said to have formerly lived on the Assineboine and Red River. Gov. Ramsey of Minnesota, in a Report in 1850 to Com. of Indian Affairs, says: "The Chief of Red Lake Chippeways of Minnesota 'some years ago met a village of Gros Ventres toward the sources of the Missouri. They learned that the smoke of the Gros Ventres' lodges once arose at Sandy Lake; that they had a large village of earthen houses at the mouth of the Savanna river, which empties into the St. Louis.'" Gros Ventres now number 620.

13. The River Crows roam between the Missouri and Marias rivers, and number 1200. The Mountain Crows are in the valley of the Yellow Stone, and are estimated at 3,000.

14. The Flat Heads live west of the Rocky Mountains, in the vicinity of Flat Head Lake and River. They are estimated to be about 1900. Are much diminished by wars with the Blackfeet. They hunt for buffalo on the plains east of the mountains.

15. The Black Feet, or Satiska, are divided into Bloods, 1560; Pigeon, or Pheasants, 2450; and Black Feet, 1500. Some of the Gros Ventres are now incorporated with them. They are between the Missouri, Sun, and Marias rivers.

Missouri, even up to the Falls, and that about thirty leagues beyond they found a narrow pass in the mountains.[16]

Bougainville gives a more full account ; he says : " He who most advanced this discovery was the Sieur de la Veranderie. He went from Fort la Reine to the Missouri. He met on the banks of this river the Mandans, or White Beards, who had seven villages with pine stockades, strengthened by a ditch. Next to these were the Kinongewiniris, or the Brochets, in three villages, and toward the upper part of the river were three villages of the Mahantas.[17] All along the mouth of the Wabiek, or Shell[18] river, were situated twenty-three villages of the Panis. To the southwest of this river, on the banks of the Ouanaradeba, or La Graisse,[20] are the Hectanes, or Snake tribe.[21] They extend to the base of a chain of mountains which runs north northeast. South of this is the river Karoskiou, or Cerise Pelee, which is supposed to flow to California.[22]



16. The entire sentence, as quoted by Magry in a letter dated July 5th 1875, reads, "Trouvent les Gorges des Missouri entre des Montagnes et le Missouri est la decharge du Lac dont on ne connait pas l'entendue."

Mullan in Map of a Military Road from Fort Benton on the Missouri, to Fort Walla-Walla on the Columbia, marks Flat Head Lake, whose waters enter the Pacific by the Columbia River, and are very near the sources of the Marias, a tributary of the Missouri.

At the Gate of the Rocky Mountains the Prickly Pear river enters the Missouri, whose head waters flow through Mullan's Pass, and are not far distant from the Bitter Root River, whose waters enter the Columbia,

The Madison branch of the Missouri nearly interlocks with the discharge of Yellow Stone Lake, and the Jefferson Fork is a short distance from the head waters of the Snake river, a tributary of the Columbia.

17. The Mahas, or Omahas on De L'Isle's Map of Louisiana are marked as near the Aaiouez Anglicized Ioways. They live now on the Missouri, in eastern Nebraska, and number about 1,000.

18. Perhaps the Mussel Shell River of modern maps.

19 The Pawnees, on De L'Isle's map are marked on the Missouri, and on Panis, now Platte river. Jeffrys, on his map, marks a tribe west of Lake Winnipeg, called Cris Panis Blanc. Drake speaks of White Pawnees, Freckled Pawnees, and Pawnees of the Platte. They now number about 1800, and dwell on a reservation on a branch of the Platte, in Nebraska.

20. *La Graisse.* There is a shrub called Grease-bush, like the currant bush, from which the Indians of Upper Missouri used to make arrow shafts. In the Wind River valley is Grease-wood Creek.

Ounaradeba, perhaps derived from the Dakotah Wasna (Ouasna) grease, and Watpa (Ouadeba) river.

21. The Snakes are known as Shoshonees, Bonacks, or Diggers. The Hictans, Padoucas, or Comanches of Texas, as well as the Utahs, are offshoots of this nation. In De L'Isle's map, the Padoucas are marked as dwelling from the Upper Missouri to the Arkansas. About 1800 Shoshonees are on a reservation in Wind River valley, Wyoming, and 1500 are about Fort Hall or Snake River, in Idaho.

22. Near the southern sources of the Missouri are found the head-waters of the Colorado, whose mouth is in the Gulf of California.

"He found in the immense region watered by the Missouri, and in the vicinity of forty leagues, the Mahantas, the Owiliniock, or Beaux Hommes, four villages; opposite the Brochets the Black Feet, three villages of a hundred lodges, each; opposite the Mandans are the Ospekakaerenousques, or Flat Heads, four villages; opposite the Panis are the Arcs of Cristinaux, and Utasibaoutchactas of Assiniboel, three villages; following these the Makesch, or Little Foxes, two villages; the Piwassa, or Great Talkers, three villages; the Kakokoschena, or Gens de la Pie, five villages; the Kiskipisounouini, or the Garter tribe, seven villages."

Galassoniere was succeeded by Jonquiere in the governorship of Canada, who proved to be a grasping, peevish, and very miserly person. For the sons of Verendrye he had no sympathy, and forming a clique to profit by their father's toils, he determined to send two expeditions toward the Pacific ocean, one by the Missouri, and the other by the Saskatchewan.

Father Coquard, one of the companions of Verendrye, was consulted as to the probability of finding a pass in the Rocky Mountains, through which they might, in canoes, reach the great lake of salt water, perhaps Puget's Sound.

The enterprise was at length confided to two experienced officers, Lamarque de Marin and Jacques Legardeur de Saint Pierre.[23] The former was assigned the way, by the Missouri, and to the latter was given the more northern route; but Saint Pierre in some way excited the hostility of the Cristinaux, who attempted to kill him, and burned Fort La Reine. His lieutenant, Boucher de Niverville,[24] who had been sent to

23. St. Pierre in 1737 was stationed at Fort Beauharnois on Lake Pepin. The Jesuit Coquard, the old associate of Verendrye, was present in September, 1755, at the battle near Lake George, and in a letter to his brother, says: "we lost on that occasion a brave officer, M de St. Pierre."

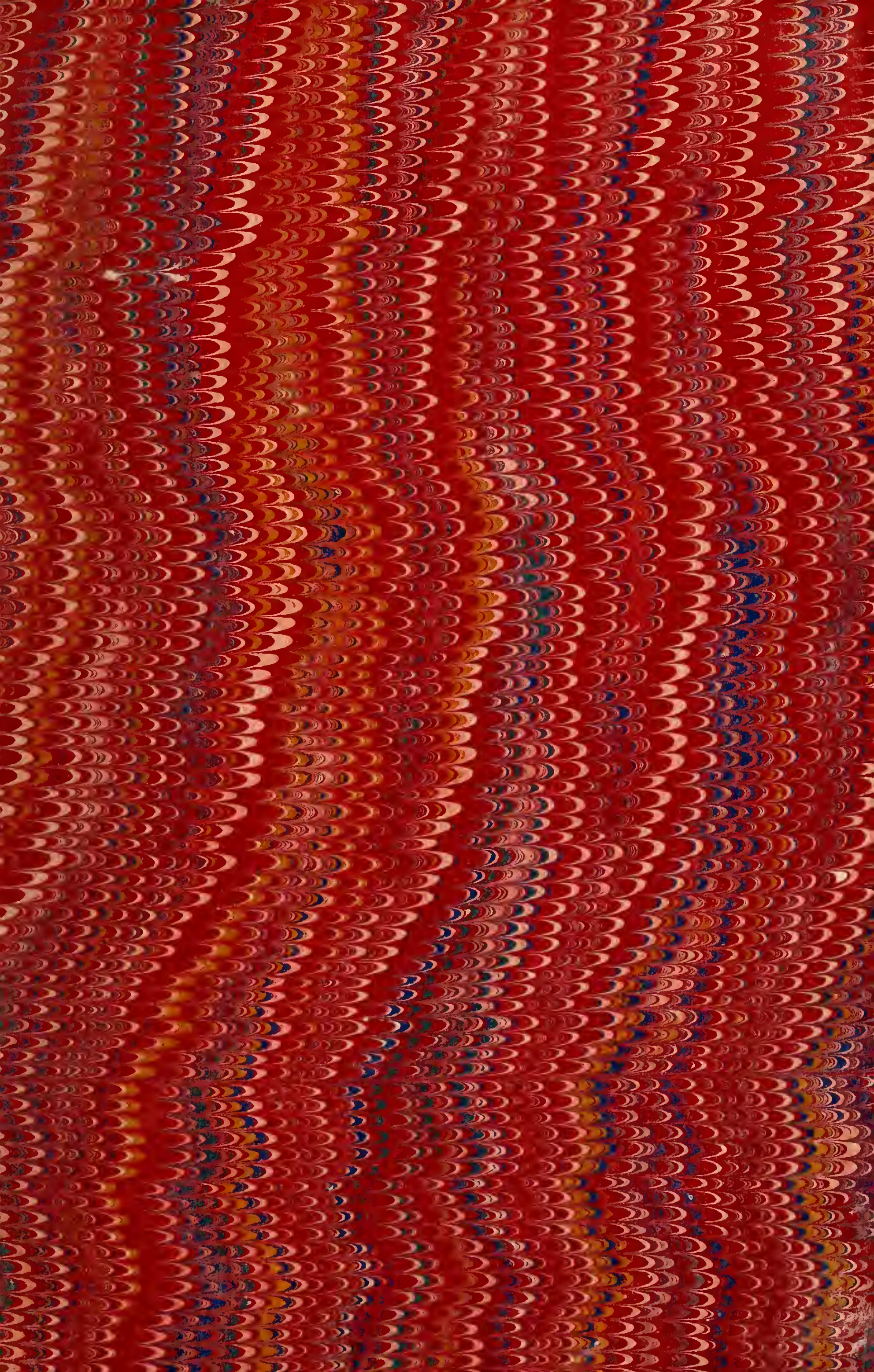
24 Boucher de Niverville in 1746 left Montreal to annoy the New England settlements, and returned in May with John Spafford and Israel Parker prisoners. In 1746 he attacked the stockade at Fall Mountain, Charlestown, New Hampshire, and during this raid burned three churches. In August, 1748, he was alarming the people at Williamstown, Fort Massachusetts. Three years later he is burning houses and capturing horses in Virginia on the banks of the Potomac, 15 leagues from Fort Cumberland He is next at the siege of Fort William Henry, and then with Montcalm, in his contest with Wolfe.

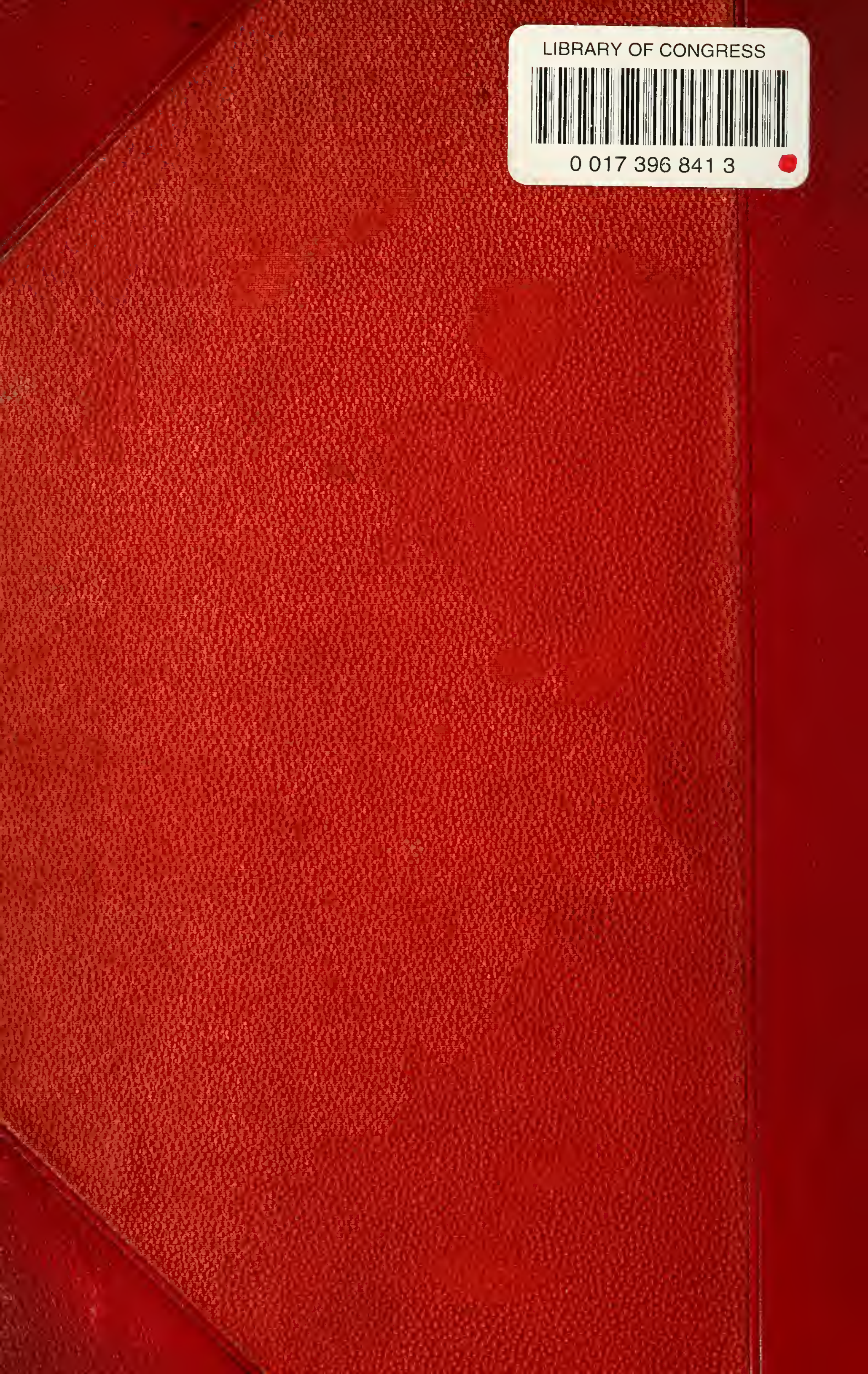
establish a post toward the source of the Saskatchewan, failed on account of sickness. Some of his men, however, pushed on to the Rocky Mountains, and in 1753, established Fort Jonquiere. Henry says St. Pierre established Fort Bourbon.

In 1753 Saint Pierre was succeeded in the command of the posts of the West, by de la Corne, and sent to French Creek, in Pennsylvania. He had been but a few days there when he received a visit from Washington, just entering upon manhood, bearing a letter from Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia, complaining of the encroachments of the French.

Soon the clash of arms between France and England began, and Saint Pierre, at the head of the Indian allies, fell near Lake George, in September, 1755, in a battle with the English. After the seven years' war was concluded, by the treaty of Paris, the French relinquished all their posts in the Northwest, and the work begun by Verendrye, was, in 1805, completed by Lewis and Clarke; and the Northern Pacific Railway is fast approaching the passes of the Rocky Mountains, through the valley of the Yellow Stone, and from thence to the great land-locked bay of the ocean, Puget's Sound.







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